

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 6942

EO -11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS VS

SUBJ: CIVILIAN DETAINEES: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A. ROME 2973 B. BONN 05322 C. SAIGON 6761

1. SUMMARY: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS INDICATE THE GVN IS BEGINNING TO COUNTER- ATTACK ON THE CIVILIAN DETAINEE PROPAGANDA FRONT AFTER ALLOWING THE PRG A LARGE HEAD START. USE OF GVN LIST OF 67,501 " MISSING" CIVILIANS, OFFER TO CONSIDER FOR RETURN PERSONS NOT LISTED AS " COMMON CRIMINALS" IF IDENTIFIED BY THE PRG, PRES THIEU' S STATEMENTS ON FACE THE NATION, TO THE POPE AND TO FRG PRES HEINEMANN, CONTINUING RELEASES OF NON- COMMUNIST POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, AND A CONVERSATION WITH AN MFA OFFICIAL ALL INDICATE GVN IS AT LAST RESPONDING TO PRG PRESSURE CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

2. PRG HAS REPEATEDLY CHARGED THAT "200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS" ARE BEING TORTURED IN SAIGON' S PRISONS" IN NEGOTIATING FORA AS WELL AS IN PROPAGANDA MEDIA. SAME THEME HAS BEEN STRESSED INTENSIVELY BY ANTI- WAR GROUPS IN THE US AND WESTERN EUROPE. ON RECENT WORLD TOUR PRES THIEU WAS ASKED TO RESPOND TO SIMILAR CHARGES BY THE POPE, AND PRES (REF A AND B) HEINEMANN. AT LAST THE GVN IS RESPONDING ON SEVERAL LEVELS, ALTHOUGH THE GVN RESPONSE CANNOT SO FAR BE CALLED A COUNTER- OFFENSIVE SINCE TH SHOTS HAVE BEEN QUITE SCATTERED AND, SO FAR AS WE KNOW, THERE IS AS YET NO CENTRAL DIRECTION OR COHERENT PLAN.

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3. ON THE NEGOTIATING FRONT , THE GVN HAS BEGUN TO MAKE INCREASED USE OF ITS LIST OF 67,501 CIVILIANS (16,754 " CADRE" AND 50,747 " CITICIZENS") WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED SINCE 1954. THE GVN DOES NOT CLAIM ALL THESE PEOPLE ARE BEING HELD BY THE PRG , BUT DOES DEMAND AN ACCOUNTING AND ASKS THAT THOSE THE PRG DOES HOLD SHOULD BE ELEASED IN RETURN FOR CIVILIAN DETAINEES HELD BY THE GVN. ALSO, AT A PRESS BRIEFING APRIL 17 AN MFA SPOKESMAN REAFFIRMED AND EXPANDED UPON AN EARLIER STATEMENT BY THE GVN PARIS DELEGATION SPOKESMAN BY SAYING THAT " COMMON CRIMINALS" HELD BY THE GVN WOULD BE SONCIDERED FOR RETURN" IF THE OTHER SIDE CAN PROVE (THEY ARE ELIGIBLE THROUGH AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS GIVING THEIR NAMES AND AGES, AND CITING THEIR CONNECTIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST CAUSE". THE GVN IS THUS TACITLY ADMITTING THAT THERE MAY BE PRISONERS WHO FALL WITHIN THE EFINATION OF " CIVILIAN DETAINEE" CONTAINED IN THE PRISONER PROTOCOL AMONG THOSE CLASSIFIED AS " COMMON CRIMINALS" (REF C).

4. PRES THIEU' S STATEMENTS TO THE FACE THE NATION PANEL, THE POPE AND PRES HEINEMANN ADD UP TO A REVERSAL OF PREVIOUS POLICY WHICH HAS BEEN, SINCE THE TIGER CAGE AFFAIR, TO EAL UP THE GVN PRISON SYSTEM BEHIND A WALL OF SECRECY. THE GVN NOW IS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE NUMBERS AND CATEGORIES OF PRISONERS IT HOLDS, ALBEIT NOT WITH COMPLETE CANDOR (REF C), AND IS COMMITTED ANEW TO ALLOW PRESS AND FOREIGN DIPLOMATS TO TOUR PRISONS. HOWEVER, AS OF THIS DATE, SAIGON OFFICIALDOM HAS YET TO ARRANGE THE TOURS PRES THIEU REFERRED TO ON FACE THE NATION; ALTHOUGH REPORTERS CONTINUE TO PRESS THE GVN, THEY ARE TOLD THAT ARRANGEMENTS ARE NOT YET COMPLETE.

5. RELEASES OF NON- COMMUNIST POLITICAL PRISONERS, WHO ARE THE MAIN FOCUS OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENSION ON THE GVN' S DETENTION POLICIES, CONTINUE. FOLLOWING THE GENERALLY WELL- RECEIVED RELEASE OF TRUONG DINH DZU, THE GVN APRIL 17 ANNOUNCED THE RELEASE OF FOURTEEN BHDDHIST STUDENT LEADERS ARRESTED DURING THE 1971 DISTURGANCES AND IN THE MAY 1972 ROUNDUPS. THIS WAS INTERPRETED AS A RESPONSE TO AN QUANG PRESSURE, AND CAME AT A TIME WHEN THE ACTING HEAD OF AN QUANG, VEN THEIN MINH WAS UNDER PRESSURE FOR ALLEGED FAILURE TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF DETAINED AN QUANG MEMBERS. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY SOURCES IN THE NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIAN EMBASSIES ; WHO ARE ALSO PURSUING THE QUESTION OF CIVILIAN DETAINEES WITH GREAT VIGOR, THAT, ACCORDING TO THEIR GVN SOURCES, AROUNF100 NON- COMMUNIST DETAINEES, MOSTLY STUDENTS, ARE TO BE RELEASED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THESE ARE TO INCLUDE THE LEADERSHIP OF THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WHICH HAS BEEN ONE OF THE GROUPS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORGANIZED
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OUTCRY AND LETTER- WRITING CAMPAIGN THAT HAS BROUGHT THE QUESTION OF
" POLITICAL PRISONERS" TO ITS PRESENT PROMINENT POSITION. HOWEVER,
WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO GET OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION FROM OUR GVN
SOURCES.

6. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS APRIL 19, A RANKINGMFA OFFICERS,
MFA ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER FOR RESEARCH GIANG, SOLICITED
OUR VIEWS ON POLITICAL PRISONER QUESTION, AND EXPRESSED PUZZLE-
MENT OVER THE EGREE TO WHICH THIS ISSUE HAS CAPTURED THE INTEREST
OF NON- VIETNAMESE. HE SAID THAT THE CLAIM THAT THERE ARE
200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN SAIGON' S PRISONS WAS RIDICULOUS
AND " PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE" AND ASKED HOW ANYONE COULD POSSIBLY
BELIEVE IT. EMBOFFS REPLIED THAT MOST PEOPLE HAD NEVER BEEN TO
VIETNAM AND WERE THUS IN NO POSITION TO QUESTION THE PRG CLAIMS ,
AND THAT THE GVN' S SILENCE ON THIS QUESTION UNTIL RECENTLY HAD LEFT
THE FIELD OPEN TO THE OTHER SIDE TO SPREAD THESE REPORTS WITHOUT
REBUTTAL.

7. COMMENT: IF THE REACTION OF MR GIANG IS ANY GUIDE, THE LESSON OF
PRES THIEU' S EXPERIENCE IN THE US AND EUROPE HAS NOT BEEN LOST
ON GVN OFFICIALS. HOPEFULL Y, THIS WILL LEAD TO INCREASED ATTENTION
BEING GIVEN TO THE FOREIGN- POLICY ASPECTS OF GVN INTERNAL SECURITY
POLICY INTHE FUTURE, AND TO INTENSIFICATION OF EFFORTS TO GET THE
GVN' S SIDE OF THE STORY ON THE PUBLIC RECORD. END COMMENT .
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